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REPORT OF COMMITTEE J ON THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE SEVERAL HONORARY DEGREES AND THE BASIS FOR CONFERRING THEM

Your Committee has not considered the problem of the retention or abolition of honorary degrees, deeming it at once beyond the bounds of practical politics and the scope of the remit of the Association.

I

(1) Despite natural expectation to the contrary, a wide survey of degrees and of the procedure of institutions (American and foreign) conferring them, shows that:

(a) Unconscious agreement exists to some extent with regard to the meaning of the several degrees;

(b) It is evident that positive disapproval of recent and present methods of selection prevails at very few institutions. As a matter of fact, severe criticism emerges in one case alone;

(c) On the other hand, a general feeling, difficult to crystallize sharply, indicates the wisdom, if not the necessity, of certain changes in the *distribution* of the choice of recipients, in the expectation that better and *fewer* selections might result;

(d) There is agreement to the effect that the greatest difficulty, and the abuses, if any, arise when an institution confers honors on its own alumni or immediate constituency. The question mainly concerns "successful" alumni—successful in very different walks of life. It is not easy to find a degree adjustable to the various kinds of achievement, while the delicate relation of a college or university to its own children complicates the situation.

Further, it may be said with some confidence that, on the whole, too many *doctorates* are bestowed proportionately for practical or administrative success, too few upon representative leaders of scholarship, science, and technology. Moreover, all things considered, this disproportion is traceable with high likelihood to the constitution of the boards or committees upon whom the selection devolves.

Star-chamber methods are not so common as might be supposed, but the real importance of honorary degrees is too little considered,

—in any case, sufficient care and time are not always given to full deliberation. A contrast is traceable here between American and European institutions (notably the British universities, whose customs in conferring honorary degrees parallel our own much more closely than those of the Continent). Here again, the reason can be set down in all likelihood, to the *personnel* of the selectors.

II

Turning to the meaning of the several degrees. In a few instances this is evident on the face of it.

(1) D.C.L. (conferred seldom by the American institutions) is convertible with LL.D.

(2) D.D or S.T.D. is conferred upon ecclesiastical administrators or working pastors (85 of 89 degrees investigated). Denominations play a great part. Curiously enough, there is no honorary degree specifically attesting achievement in scientific theology. Possibly, it might be advisable for universities having a theological faculty and for the foremost theological seminaries to institute the D.Theol. for this purpose. But your Committee makes no recommendation.

(3) Mus.D., Math.D., Chem.D., Eng.D., and D.P.H. form a group by themselves. Their meaning is obvious; they are conferred rarely. Mus.D., Eng.D., and D.P.H. should never be conferred except by universities possessing the relevant faculty.

This leaves the degrees of LL.D., Litt.D. (or L.H.D.), Sc.D., A.M. and M.S.—the usual honors bestowed.

LL.D.

An analysis of 447 degrees, conferred by 37 institutions, serves to warrant two conclusions:

First, there is unconscious agreement in America and England that this is the suitable recognition of eminence or success in public life or administration. In the American lists, no less than 85 per cent of the total is contributed by public men, administrators, ecclesiastics, physicians and surgeons; scholars and investigators form but 8.06 per cent. Seeing that this degree is generally esteemed the highest *academic* honor, these figures indicate some lurking defect in methods of selection;

Second, however, the scholars or investigators who do receive the degree are always men of more than ordinary distinction and, as a rule, men of the highest eminence in their respective depart-

ments. At Oxford, the proportion of scholars and investigators who receive the D.C.L. is 19 per cent; this notwithstanding a distinct and growing convention to confer this degree upon statesmen, or great civil servants and other "empire makers"; and an equally distinct convention to provide for experts with the D.Litt. and D.Sc. Figures show that, compared with American institutions under consideration, Oxford confers the D.Litt. nearly $2\frac{1}{2}$ times more frequently, the D.Sc. just thrice as often. Thus much more ample provision is made for scholarly and scientific achievement. At the four Scottish universities the proportion of administrators, etc., falls to 23.6 per cent, while that of scholars, etc. rises to 49 per cent. However, comparison is complicated by the fact that the LL.D. is the sole distinction open to laymen. (An act of Parliament specifies that the specialist doctorates (D.Phil., D.Sc., and D.Litt.) must be earned).

Litt.D.

Unconscious agreement is more definite here. Of 89 degrees considered, 71 were bestowed upon scholars and investigators, 12 upon public men and administrators, 3 upon artists, 2 upon journalists, 1 upon a physician.

Sc.D.

Agreement here is overwhelming. Of 83 degrees, 64 were conferred upon investigators, 10 upon physicians and surgeons, 6 upon technicians, 2 upon architects.

A.M.

Mainly for the reasons stated above, this degree fails to indicate any consensus. Therefore, it is well to let the figures speak for themselves. The number reviewed was 44. They divide as follows: administrators, 11; public men, 7; physicians, 3; investigators, 3; journalists, 2; technician, 1; unclassified, 17, among them 7 women. None of these 17 appear in *Who's Who in America*. It may be noted, as a significant commentary upon the standing of the various recipients of the degrees that, in the case of LL.D., only two fail to appear in the American or British *Who's Who*; Litt.D., 2; Sc.D., 1; A.M., 17 of 44; D.D., 50 of 89. Comment is superfluous.

III

It is plain that the crux of the situation concerns the LL.D. and the A.M.

It is advisable, doubtless, that our institutions should enjoy means of recognizing public and administrative service. It is anomalous to say the least, that in one of our institutions generally accounted a great *university*, administrative officials should possess 12 honorary degrees while the entire staff of scholars and investigators (numbering some of the most eminent men in the world) should have just half this number: In other words, all is not well with the "fountain of honor." It is desirable, doubtless, that our institutions should recognize many kinds of merit in their own alumni; but they should have a care to use due deliberation.

IV

The following principles seem obvious:

- (1) Provision should be made for full and detailed deliberation on all proposed recipients of honorary degrees;
- (2) The committee of selection should be large enough to be representative, small enough to be workable;
- (3) As these degrees are *academic* honors, the expert staff should have a large, if not the main, determining weight;
- (4) Conditions at different institutions vary so much that any recommended plan should possess flexibility.

Your Committee is of opinion that the most stable method of selection is that in vogue at the Scottish universities. Here, on each of the two honorary degrees (LL.D. and D.D.) committees must be appointed by the senate (full professors) at the beginning of the academic year; these committees must report back, and their report must lie on the table for one month before final action be taken. Adapting these regulations to our conditions your Committee recommends:

- (1) That a committee on honorary degrees be appointed before Thanksgiving of each year;
- (2) That it consist of the President *ex officio*; of one or two members of the governing board *ex officiis*; and of not less than six members of the faculties;
- (3) That, in selecting the faculty members, care be taken to provide for regular rotation of representatives of different departments of investigation; the intent being that these should change from year to year;
- (4) That this committee keep a careful record so that continuity of action be safeguarded.

In the smaller institutions, it might be wise for the committee to report to the faculty as a whole; in the largest institutions this seems impracticable. Therefore, in all cases, publicity should be given within the institution to the *personnel* of the committee, which should be so selected as to enlist confidence.

This provides a definite plan, yet one elastic enough to admit alteration from institution to institution so as to meet local conditions.

Your Committee inclines to believe that, in the larger institutions at least, the committee on honorary degrees should appoint a sub-committee, not necessarily from its own membership, to deal with alumni, especially those who may be due to celebrate class anniversaries. In this regard, conditions at different institutions are so diverse that a single plan of procedure can not be suggested.

On the whole, if means be taken to safeguard the spirit of honorary degrees, by giving more time for deliberation and a great deal more *internal* publicity, a notable advance will have been made.

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